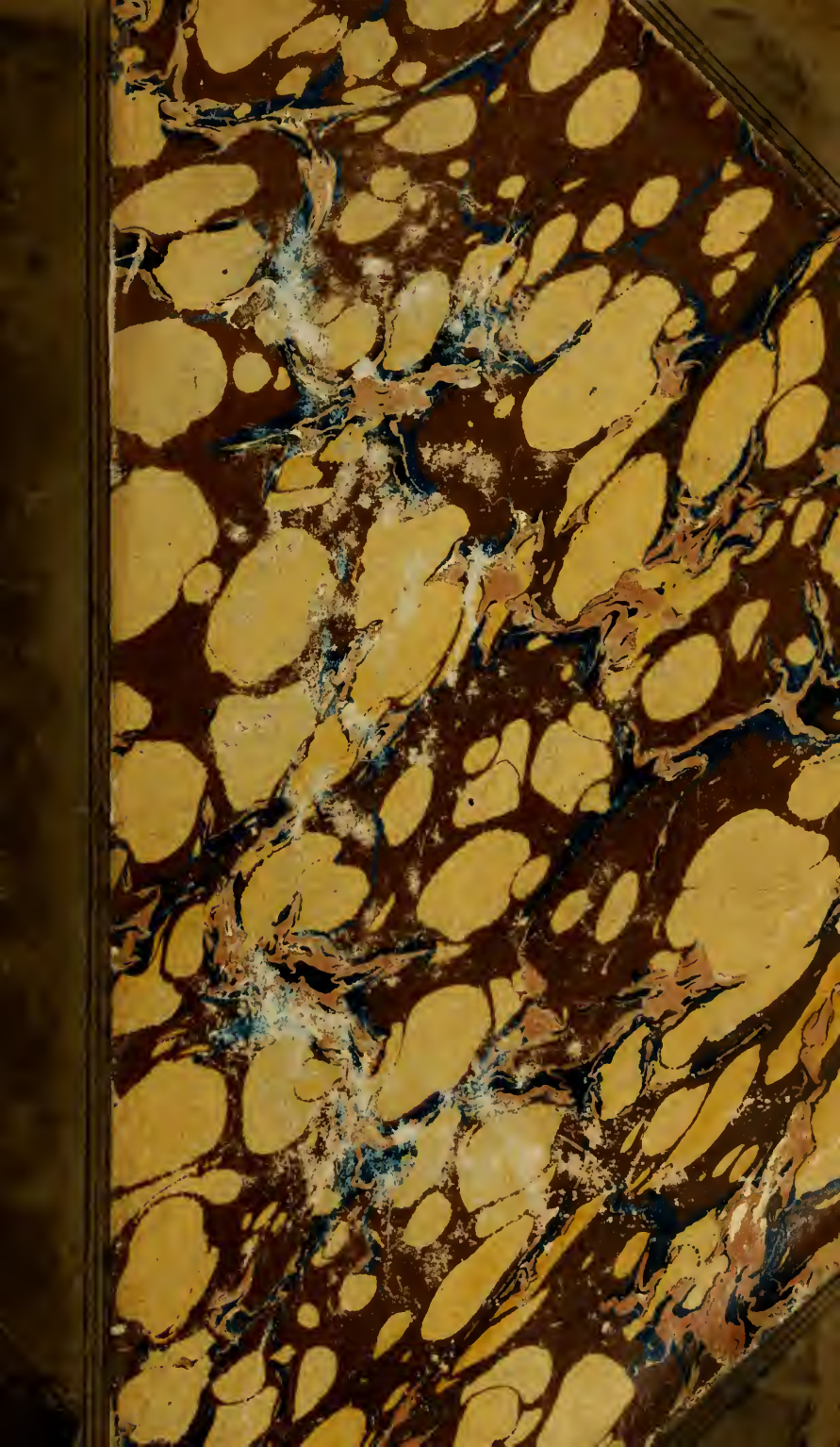

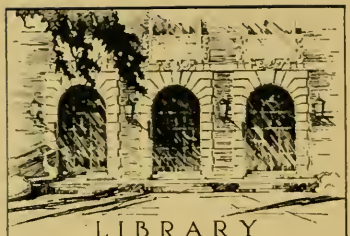

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL OF

ST. MARK'S COLLEGE, CHELSEA,

APRIL 25TH, 1865.

BY THE

REV. DERWENT COLERIDGE, M.A.,

RECTOR OF HANWELL, AND PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL;
LATE PRINCIPAL OF ST. MARK'S COLLEGE.

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TO THE

STUDENTS AND MASTERS,

PAST AND PRESENT,

OF ST. MARK'S COLLEGE, CHELSEA,

This Sermon,

PREACHED AT THE ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL OF THE COLLEGE,

St. Mark's Day, April 25th, 1865,

AND NOW PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND WELL-WISHER,

THE AUTHOR.

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

MATTHEW XIII. 31.

"The kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field."

THE parable of the Grain of Mustard Seed is one of a series of similitudes, recounted with some instructive variations, by each of the three first Evangelists; in which our Lord sets forth the nature, rise and progress of the Church—the kingdom of God, or of Heaven, founded by Him upon earth. It is like seed cast into various soils, with various results. It is like good seed intermingled with tares, which are to spring up and grow together till the harvest. It is like a very small seed, which yet, under favourable conditions, may grow up into a tree-like herb, with sheltering branches. It is like leaven, an active principle, which presently stirs, enlivens, and eventually qualifies the entire mass into which it is introduced. It is a hid treasure, a goodly pearl to be procured at any cost. It is like a net, which gathers together both good and bad, to be separated when it shall be drawn to the shore.—The point specially brought out in the third of these comparisons, which forms the text of my discourse,

is that inherent power of growth in the Church which from a small beginning issues in a large and conspicuous product. Conditions more or less favourable are implied. The Divine seed must have been cast into a suitable and properly prepared soil; it must be watered by the dews and rain of heaven; it must be sufficiently protected from external injury. And such is the case. Its growth may, indeed, be checked, it may be stunted, distorted; it may lose a withered branch; it may have to recover from a partial blight; —for it has to struggle with counter influences opposed to life; and it is liable to inward decay: but it will not perish utterly; for it springs from a lively root, and the blessing of Heaven is upon it. The image is taken from the world of nature; but we cannot disengage the interpretation from moral considerations. The soil into which the vigorous germ is cast is the human heart—long prepared for its reception, and made capable, by a mysterious process, of yielding the desired increase;—yet not altogether a good soil—far from wholly good. Man is himself responsible for the issue. He is an agent in the Divine husbandry, of which he is himself the subject. His will must be brought into unison with the Divine will, but only by means consistent with its characteristic freedom.

There is a power of good to which all heaven and earth bears witness, and which we believe to be the original and eternal law of the universe. There is also a power of evil, so general in its manifestations, so fatally operative, that men have been tempted to regard it as equally original and eternal with the law of good. Faith teaches a different lesson. It is but a canker at the root of the tree of life,

however introduced, which the vital energy will eventually overcome and throw off.

I shall take leave to turn these thoughts into a particular channel. What is true of the whole is true, within certain limits, of the parts, in so far as they are integral, and partake of the common life. Every seed that is planted, having an expansive power of growth — every living seed — may be expected to produce a certain increase, proportionate to its culture, and the circumstances attending its growth and development — what may be called its external history. I propose to speak of the seed which has been planted here in this educational seed-plot — its nature and upspring — recounting, in the briefest summary, the outward fortunes of the institution, and shall, in conclusion, cast a glance at the future, not as pretending to any gift of foresight, but in trustful reliance upon a fruitful principle and in submissive dependance on Divine Providence.

A quarter of a century has now elapsed since the design of the College was first conceived in its general outline. In little more than a year it was opened for the reception of students. The necessity of an improved and extended system of national education, accessible to all classes, had, from towards the close of the last century, occupied the thoughts and employed the efforts of individual benevolence. It was now beginning to excite public attention. It was felt, as well in the interest of human nature as of the social fabric, that a better and fuller cultivation of the mental faculties was required—not for the privileged orders only. It must be extended to "the hewers of wood and the drawers

of water." It was a good in itself — at all events a mean of good. It was a boon which the humblest might claim, whether from his richer neighbour, in the way of charity, or from the community at large, on general grounds, and for its own sake. In some way or other, education was to be offered to all; but, what were to be its direction and immediate aim? The question has both a secular and a religious aspect, which may be viewed either separately or in combination. To some a more enlightened self-interest, greater prudence, foresight and economy, more worthy desires, a capacity for less debasing pleasures, more skilful craftmanship, a quicker invention, and a purer taste, appeared to be the appropriate fruits. Such a produce would benefit both the individual and the commonwealth. Religion, however necessary, was a thing apart. It must pursue its own ends in its own way. It must not interpose any obstacle in the path of public education.—By others this view was regarded with little favour. A little learning was a dangerous thing. More than a little would not advance the welfare, and would lessen the usefulness of the labouring poor. Their education must at any rate be directed, if not limited, to the precious privilege of reading God's written word, and to suitable instruction in the truths of the Gospel. If this occasion any inconvenience, it must be overcome, or borne with.

These opposing views have still their respective advocates. The prevailing system partakes more or less of both. It is important, however, that the principle of reconcilement should be clearly understood, when a far more perfect combination might be effected. As a matter of fact, popular education has been mainly supported, and therefore directed,

by the religious feeling of the country. Religious zeal may not always be according to knowledge; but the restrictive character of the views with which it has been more or less associated, is by no means imputable to the religious element. Every good and perfect gift—the skill of Bezaleel, no less than the wisdom of Moses, or the service of Aaron—is from above—from the Father of lights, and must be continually referred to its divine source. Neither an enlightened faith nor an enlightened policy views with any alarm or jealousy the increase of human knowledge, so called, in any order of men. All knowledge is, or may be, divine. Theology is the mother of the arts in a wider sense than is commonly attached to this adage, and may not repudiate or neglect her humblest offspring. No other view is consistent with Christian liberty, which cannot exist without enlightenment. The Christian servant is not to be a serf, whether his bondage be fixed by law or secured by the faster chain of ignorance. He is a brother beloved. There can be no Gibeonites in the Christian commonwealth.

Popular education, thus regarded in a truly religious light, may be limited by its means and opportunities, not by its aim. It seeks to plant a Divine seed, capable of indefinite expansion, calculated to produce all the fruits of a cultivated humanity, restored to its true character, and rendered able to follow its high destiny, in Christ. Therefore it demands Christian guidance. Whatever knowledge may awaken in its possessor the sense of freedom and of duty—twin sisters that cannot live apart; whatever may develop his natural powers, and help to draw out and direct his special faculties; whatever may

lend dignity to manual labour, and add skill and contrivance to mechanic craft; whatever may rouse in the son of toil an honourable desire to improve and adorn his condition, to value home comforts, to understand his own true interests and those of his children, to look forward and provide for the future—all such knowledge may be freely offered, not only or so much for its own sake, as because it is a condition and accompaniment of that spiritual energy—that living life—which underlies the dying life of the body, and which it is the special province of the religious teacher to stimulate, to sustain, to inform.

But if these views may be accepted not merely as safe, but as affording the only sure means of safety to our social state—if so we may hope to supply both food and medicine to the body politic—how much will depend upon the schoolmaster! Without a competent teacher there can indeed be no good teaching. At the time to which I have referred, this obvious truth, long neglected, had forced itself into notice. It had been thought that the children of the poor could be cheaply and sufficiently instructed under very ordinary superintendence, by suitable management. The children were to teach each other. This and other methods were tried, and were found wanting. It is not necessary to examine their respective merits. Whether carried on under a direct religious sanction, or left to work independently, they laboured under one capital defect. *No machinery can supply the want or insufficiency of the living agent.* It was now, at length, admitted that as the schoolmaster such is the school; and it was further perceived that, to obtain good schoolmasters, they must, as a rule, be trained for their office. Here again the specialties of that

training were considered of prime importance. The teacher must be well grounded in the elements of learning. He must be habituated to the care of children, and must be made acquainted with the best models of systematic instruction. Fully recognizing the necessity of such special preparation, it was yet held by those to whom the design and institution of St. Mark's College are chiefly due, that this superstructure must rest upon a deeper basis. Without a sense of duty, and a single-minded devotion to his work, there could be no good schoolmaster. No knowledge, no skill would supply this defect. To implant, or at least to foster and mature this dutiful and devoted spirit, he must be trained in the light and in the warmth of a religious principle: a distinct principle, or there could be no light; openly professed and encouraged, or there could be no warmth. Accordingly, the College was established under the auspices of a Society strictly connected with, and to some considerable extent representing, the National Church, in the matter of education. It was to teach the doctrines, it was to conform to the discipline, it was to wear the venerable aspect of the National Church, in the hope that it might be conducted in the spirit of the Church Catholic; in the belief that so best it might do its part in advancing the kingdom of God. As it was early said, this Chapel, with its high and constant service, was to be the key-stone of the arch.

So was the seed sown; and, if it has exhibited anything of a diviner quality—if it has borne any good fruit—if it has shown any faculty of growth—let not the piety, let not the prayers of the good men that waited upon the sowing—many of them now gone to

rest—be forgotten in the estimate. Yet, further, it was held that no material apparatus, no outward observance, no specific teaching would avail unless the subject of such teaching were fitly and sufficiently prepared for its reception—unless the human mind, the soil into which the seed was to be cast, were duly cultivated. Hence the development and training of the mental faculties, as distinct from, though in combination with, the particular exercise for which they were intended, was to be a characteristic feature of the system. It was argued that unless these young men were in some measure furnished for every good work, they would be found but poorly furnished for any good work. Particular proficiency is, for the most part, but the casual direction of general power; and the particular work for which these students were destined,—education in its fullest sense, if not in its higher forms,—seemed to be such as might well and worthily employ, if it did not absolutely require, no inconsiderable amount of general faculty, variously cultivated. Accordingly a large, an expansive and a trustful view of the question was entertained. Starting from, and continually recurring to, that sense of personal responsibility without which no Christian workman is worthy of his calling, the best and fullest education has been offered to each individual, according to his measure, care being taken that the particular application of his knowledge should be constantly kept before him;—in the confident belief that the force of principle, the great and indispensable requisite, would in each case be so helped by the tendency of habit, and the strong leading of circumstance, as to produce, upon the whole, the contemplated results.

Of the outward fortunes of the College—the conditions under which the seed thus sown has sprung up and flourished—I shall say but a few words. Upheld in the first instance by the admirable Society under whose sanction it had been established, aided by a few invaluable friends, it subsequently obtained large and increasing assistance from the State, on terms consistent with its own principles, and well calculated to promote both its usefulness and its expansion. By a series of liberal and enlightened measures the Government of the country undertook to assist effectually, and in some sort to guide the education of the people, in conjunction with the religious bodies, and this without interfering injuriously with their freedom of action. The best effects ensued, as in the country at large, so in the growth and development of the College. This public acknowledgment I feel to be due from me on the present occasion. A different view has since prevailed in the councils of the State. The responsibility involved in the former line of proceeding has, it would seem, been declined. I offer no opinion on this change. Whether the Government—the responsible majesty, will, or wisdom—of the nation, has anything to do, or what it has to do, in its imperial character, as with the defence and other national interests, so with the education of the people—whether it lie under any obligation on this score—are questions too difficult and too extensive to be discussed here, if otherwise appropriate. Rather let me return to the leading thought of this discourse, while I set forth the fundamental truth that whatever support may still be needed from without, the best hope of permanence for this and for every other institution, human or

Divine, is to be sought, under Providence, in the vigour of the root and the vital sap that circulates through the branches. And even as the stately tree, increasing in strength as it grows, by virtue of the silent energy that works from within, derives its needful sustenance not only from the ground out of which it springs, but from the leaves which it puts forth, year by year, renewing evermore the life and vigour of the parent trunk from which they hang—so, passing from the image to that which it imperfectly represents, let me trust that those who year after year go out from this College, separated but not severed—still parts of the spreading organism, its natural produce, and fitting ornament, may long combine, each in the exercise of his proper function, to keep up and nourish the central life. I say each in the exercise of his proper function. I do not now speak of material help—of sacrifices, more or less costly, made in grateful requital for benefits received. Whatever has been, or may be done, in this kind derives its highest value from the feeling which it indicates. It is by well doing, each at his own post, and in his own line of duty—it is by the work which they perform, by the character that they earn, and the position that they occupy, that the *alumni* of St. Mark's College will best sustain and protect their *Alma Mater*—a band of hope, posted in different stations, but united in spirit and in purpose.

Hitherto I have refrained from using the style of a personal address, not wishing to obscure the general interest of the subject by any transient or temporary allusion. The few words of admonition that follow, will most becomingly be directed to those with whom my pastoral connection, though it has

ceased in form, will ever be maintained in prayer and love; and here let me speak to you who are present, as representing the larger number who are absent.

The lesson, suggested by the name you bear as students, past or present, of St. Mark's College, has often been repeated in this place, on this your anniversary festival. The example of St. Mark—the ministering youth, the aged saint;—the weakness which led him to shrink from the toil, the privations, and the danger to which he was exposed in his course of duty, with his signal repentance, known to us by the fruit of his after life;—this edifying example has often been set before you. A less obvious, but not less edifying, improvement may be derived from his modesty, as shown in the composition of his Gospel—a modesty characteristic not of himself alone, but of every human instrument, similarly influenced and employed;—every effective agent in any Divine—any good and noble work. In one casual incident—that of the young man who fled away naked at the crucifixion, he has been supposed to refer to himself; but he has withheld his name. He has bequeathed to the Church a priceless treasure, but he has left it to the Church to record the author of the gift. This modesty—this forgetfulness of self—this willingness to work for the work's sake,—simply regarded as duty—or, if any further inducement be wanting, for the sake of the high ends which many sought and reached through the humblest channels; this modesty I would commend to you with affectionate earnestness, as the best spirit and only becoming form of your outward lives. Let it not be supposed that this has to be shown in ordinary cases, or is at all likely in your case to give

occasion for any condescension, or notable self-abasement; still less that it is inconsistent with real dignity, or with that true self-respect which every man, and surely every Christian man, will do well to cherish. Its outward manifestation is in exact correspondence with the dictates of what we call common, or, still better, good sense, and worldly discretion. It has the promise of this life. Yet the only source from which it will flow, purely, constantly, and universally, is Christian humility. This, while it will go far to secure peace of heart and inward contentment, will lend a charm to your outward manner and demeanour, rendering all restless, suspicious, self-assertion as needless as it is, too often, unbecoming.

And with Christian humility let there be united a full measure of Christian earnestness, which is the energy of Christian love. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. Let not the monotony of your occupation bring with it indolence, languor, or neglect. There is indeed no real monotony in your work. Every individual child may open a field of fresh observation, awaken a new interest, and stimulate to a particular effort.

In the last place, let me exhort you to be "temperate in all things." There is a watchful self-government demanded of all men, and of you with especial strictness, as well by worldly prudence as by the far higher code of Christian morals. But my meaning goes beyond this. I have no wish to damp the ardour of youthful feeling, or darken the out-look of opening life; yet there is an evenness of mind which is the ordinary companion of cheerfulness; a habit of self-denial which is the surest pledge of lasting

enjoyment; a moderated expectation, which lends strength to hope, while it baffles disappointment.

Modesty, earnestness, temperance—the virtues of a man, are the graces of a Christian, and must be sought from above. Long may the voice of prayer be lifted up, day by day, in this chapel! Long may it be your privilege, and that of your successors, here and elsewhere, to take your parts in "service high, and anthem clear." But remember! my young friends, that this is an easy, and, even when accompanied by pleasurable feelings, may not be a profitable exercise. To pray is not so easy. To pray faithfully, earnestly, continually, is not an easy, nor I fear, an ordinary attainment. It is the highest gift of God. Seek it, wrestle for it, cling to it, as the very breath of your spiritual life. Let my last word, addressed to you in this sacred place—my last, as it has ever been my first, fall distinctly upon your ears, and oh, may it sink deeply in your hearts. That word is *Prayer*.

So shall the seed sown in this College bear its natural increase; and so shall you return to the parent tree, with which, however separate in place, you are still, I trust, united in dutiful affection, the strength and nourishment which you have received.

The kingdom of God, the spreading, towering, sheltering herb, which has sprung up from the true grain of mustard seed, inherits an everlasting promise. In some place, in some form and measure, ever, we trust, more and more fully and perfectly, the Divine idea will find its earthly counterpart. It is not so with its several parts or manifestations. They may perish, may be violently broken off, or insensibly pine and wither, whether by a less vital intercommunion with the hidden root, or by the

secret will and mysterious procedure of all-controlling Providence. They may cease to be wanted under such a shape, and bearing such a name. Yet the same instinct which covets and predicts immortality for our personal selves, leads us to desire permanence for the institutions which embody our human spirit, and minister to human ends. I have ventured to claim for this College, at least in its design and purpose, a relation, however humble, yet subservient to that divine kingdom, which, though it be not of this world, is yet ever coming into the world, and destined to come with power. May we then look forward, and in what direction? First, if there be any truth, any living energy in those principles which I have endeavoured to illustrate, let us look to the continued exhibition of those principles, in their essential spirit, if with other applications, here at the centre. Then, to the cordial co-operation and affectionate support of all its members, each in his own function, keeping up the life of the body, while he preserves his own. Lastly, to what we call the course of events; in other words, to the overruling will of God. So regulated, so supported, so divinely guided and protected, I trust and pray that the future of St. Mark's College may be an ever-expanding, ever-brightening image of its past.

Richard Barrett, Printer, 13, Mark Lane, London.